

ally in a region of significant importance and a valued partner to the United States. Under President Ilham Aliyev's leadership, Azerbaijan has made important contributions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo. He supports efforts to combat terrorism, speed integration of Azerbaijan into Western institutions, and is committed to working with the United States in developing democracy and civil institutions in Azerbaijan.

President Aliyev is in Washington this week to meet with President Bush, senior Administration officials, and key congressional leaders to discuss the promotion of democracy, regional cooperation, energy security and diversification, and our Nations' commitment to working closely together to advance freedom, security, and economic independence.

Specifically, the Senate welcomes the fact that Azerbaijan is rapidly developing its national economy, growing at a rate of about 26 percent annually since 2004, which contributes to the alleviation of poverty and reaching the millennium development goals; is completing the one mbpd Baku-Ceyhan, BTC, oil pipeline and Baku-Erzurum, SCP, natural gas pipeline, set to increase energy exports and availability for the United States and its allies; and welcomes encouragement by the United States to assist the people of Azerbaijan in establishing a fully free and open democratic system, a prosperous free market economy, and its rightful place in European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, and World Trade Organization, WTO.

The Senate welcomes President Ilham Aliyev upon his first official visit to Washington and thanks him for coming.

NORTH KOREA FREEDOM DAY

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, this week the North Korean Freedom Coalition, a bipartisan coalition of NGOs and individuals, will be organizing a rally on Capitol Hill at noon on Friday, April 28, 2006, in recognition of North Korea Freedom Day.

Largely through the persistent efforts of the coalition and many others across the country, there has been an upsurge of interest in North Korea with Americans and particularly the faith communities. Members of Congress, North Korean defectors, NGO leaders from the USA, South Korea, and Japan have been holding rallies, testifying before Congress, and personally sharing their stories with others and the press to help support the plight of North Koreans and, in particular, the refugees in China and elsewhere. Thousands will gather to stand up for the freedom, human rights, and dignity of the North Korean people.

Since the Stalinist country disclosed several years ago that it had renewed efforts to develop nuclear weapons, not

a single day goes by without Pyongyang carrying out more reckless deeds to escalate the crisis or exchanging hostile threats with Washington, DC. With the six-party talks dissolving without any progress, the current nuclear standoff seems poised to continue, if not deteriorate. Many people point out, and correctly so, the need for more scholarship on the nuclear threat that North Korea poses not only to East Asia but also to the world.

The sad truth, however, is that amid the discussion of regional security and nuclear nonproliferation for South Korea, Japan, and China, as well as the war against terrorism for the United States, a central part of this issue has been neglected: the human rights of North Koreans.

It is hard to imagine a country whose citizens endure a worse or more pervasive abuse of every human right. The Government prohibits freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, religion, movement, and more. The draconian penal code stipulates capital punishment and confiscation of assets for a wide variety of "crimes against revolution," including defection, attempted defection, slander of the policies of the state, listening to foreign broadcasts, and possessing "reactionary" printed matter.

Those who escaped political concentration camps tell stories of horror beyond imagination. Prison guards kill newborn babies in front of their mothers. A female prisoner dies after being beaten by prison guards like a soccer ball, with her wounds filled with maggots. Molten metal is poured on Christians who refuse to disavow their faith. The open goal of these camps, detaining political dissidents whose loyalty to the party is "beyond recovery," is to eradicate three generations of their inmates. An estimated 1.5 million prisoners have been killed in the camps. Approximately 200,000 are currently imprisoned.

Those who risk their lives and succeed in escaping to China to find food and freedom are not better off. The Chinese Government continues to violate refugees' rights and repatriates them to North Korea, where they will most likely face persecution; North Korean refugees are exploited by those around them who threaten to report them to the authorities. The sexual slavery of North Korean refugee women in China is an urgent human rights issue that has yet to attract the attention of the international community.

In 2004, Congress passed and the President signed into law the North Korean Human Rights Act. Since passage, much has been done and various provisions of the bill have been implemented. However, much more remains to be done, especially in fully funding the authorization contained in the bill. I ask that reports from State Department required by the Act be submitted to Congress. More importantly, it is absolutely critical that we allow North Korean refugees seeking refuge in the

United States to be allowed to do so as per the provisions of the act and appropriate vetting processes. Nothing we do—not even funding—will produce more tangible results of improving the human rights of North Koreans than this gesture that is a long and hallowed part of our history and tradition. We are a nation that welcomes those facing persecution because we not only believe but practice the principal that "to whom much is given, much is required."

As the security concerns dominate headlines of all United States and international news media, the sufferings of 22 million North Koreans are missing from public awareness. It is in recognizing this desperate need for more awareness of the North Korean human rights that the coalition is organizing this timely and important event this week.

North Korean Human Rights Week will provide an opportunity for us to learn more about this tragedy that is occurring right this minute. I commend the organizers of the week, especially the members of the North Korean Freedom Coalition and its many volunteers who have given so much of their time in preparing for this important event.

It is time to shake ourselves off of shocked disbelief. And it is time to break out of apathy and ignorance and stand up for human rights in North Korea.

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, as we celebrate National Volunteer Week, I would like to take a moment to recognize four individuals for their extraordinary service to the Everybody Wins! program in Iowa.

As many of my colleagues know, Everybody Wins! is a literacy and mentoring program for elementary school students. The program gives adults the opportunity to spend one lunch hour a week reading with a child in a public school. It is the ultimate power lunch.

Eight years ago, Senator JIM JEFFORDS recruited me to join him as a volunteer for the Everybody Wins! program in Washington, DC. The time I spend at Brent Elementary is the most important and rewarding hour of my workweek. My experience also convinced me of the need to expand this program to Iowa.

In 2002, Everybody Wins! Iowa was launched. The program began as a small pilot program in 3 public schools with 15 volunteers. From this modest beginning, the program has grown, and now serves more than 260 students in 11 central Iowa schools.

The success of the Iowa program is due to the dedicated services of many individuals. Today, I would like to recognize the service of four people who served as founding members of the board of directors and who have played a critical role in the development of Everybody Wins! Iowa.